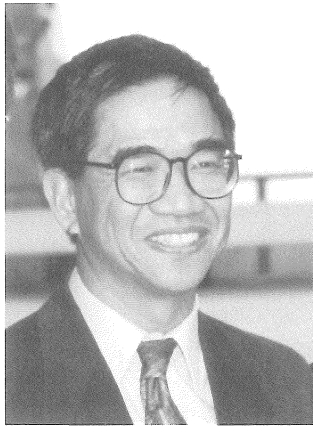# Translating Living China

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Thirty years! For any journal to thrive and prosper that long, congratulations are due. In a world where languages and cultures are constantly jostling to be understood, *Renditions*' continuing high status is something to be celebrated. This is especially the case since Chinese and English are the two most important and widely used languages in the world today. Yet, thirty years ago, much of the English-speaking world simply did not regard living Chinese literature and culture in mainland China as worthy of serious scholarly interpretation. I studied for my M.Phil. at Chinese University of Hong Kong in the mid-1970s and taught at Nanjing University in the late 1970s. I was relatively young, and it could be said that my interest in contemporary Chinese literature then reflected my naivety and lack of sophistication. Nonetheless, I was disappointed that with few exceptions, the only people who translated and published the current literature coming out of the PRC at that time were the Chinese themselves.

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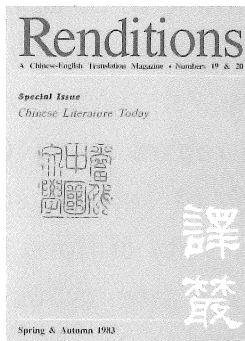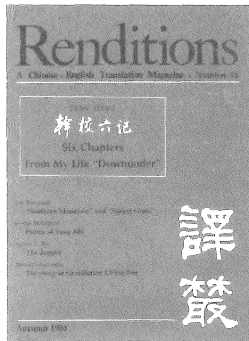
The birth of *Renditions* brought hope and anticipation. True to its promise, *Renditions* immediately presented to the English-speaking academic world some of the best Chinese writing available, translated and chosen by many Hong Kong scholars as well as sinologists from all around the world. In the late 1970s, I was caught in the enthusiasm for the 'new literature' in China, and I looked at each issue to see if anything from the 'new literature' would appear in this reputable journal. However, for the first few years of its life, *Renditions* published only traditional or modern pieces. With hindsight and a bit more maturity, I am now glad the journal waited a few more years before launching into the contemporary literary scene, because when it did, the pieces it chose to publish certainly attracted the attention of readers with both cultured tastes and those more interested in finding out about 'real life' in China.

I was overjoyed to see Howard Goldblatt's translation of Yang Jiang's 'Gan xiao liu ji' 幹校六記 (translated endearingly as 'Six Chapters from My Life "Downunder"') in the Autumn issue in 1981. In the same issue, Shiao-ling Yu 余孝玲 also translated a selection of poems by the Menglong poets Shu Ting 舒婷, Gu Cheng 顧城, Bei Dao 北島, Liang Xiaobin 梁小斌 and Liu Shaho 流沙河. In 1982, a Special Issue of 'Chinese Literature Today' was published. This was a time when literature by living writers in China was celebrated both in and outside the country. It was under this new climate, when exposure of the new writing to the rest of the world was encouraged, that Bonnie McDougall and I submitted our translation of Wan Zhi's story 'The Clock' 自鳴鐘下, which was published in 1986. Since the early 1980s, *Renditions* has made available to the

English readership some of the best works by writers living in China. The Renditions Paperbacks have also carried many excellent translations of fiction by these writers.

That Chinese writers in mainland China and abroad are translated by distinguished sinologists throughout the world and published regularly in a top journal such as *Renditions* is proof that scholars of Chinese literature see current Chinese writing as worthy of serious attention, not something that is left to political scientists and sociologists. At the same time, there have been more crossings between the different disciplines themselves. Chinese studies in the last thirty years has increasingly encompassed a much more diverse range of topics and perspectives, and investigations in Chinese literature have become broader, finer and richer. *Renditions* has played a major role in this transformation. I have been fortunate in being able to contribute (co-translating with either Bonnie McDougall or Louise Edwards) to the *Renditions* enterprise, though in only a very minor way. I certainly hope to be able to continue that effort in the next thirty years. ◈